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SUBJECT: IRAQI POLITICIAN DISCUSSES EFFORTS TO FORM
"NATIONAL FRONT" TO SOLVE IRAQ'S POLITICAL CRISIS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

Summary

¶1. (S) Council of Representatives (CoR) member Nadim al-Jabiri (Shi'a coalition - Fadhila), advisor to the Minister of State for Tourism and Antiquities Baha al-Mayah, and Judge Hussein al-Musawi of the Supreme Criminal Court outlined to PolCouns on February 8 their efforts to form a "national front" to solve Iraq's political crisis and confront Iranian influence. They claimed to have the support of Sunni political leaders and all branches of the insurgency except al-Qaida, as well as of Arab states and Turkey. On the Shi'a side, they said they had the support of Fadhila, were in advanced negotiations with the Sadrists, and were approaching Dawa leaders. Acknowledging that these groups made strange bedfellows, al-Jabiri outlined points of shared interest including withdrawal of foreign troops and the elimination of Iranian influence from the Iraqi government. He presented PolCouns with a two page document laying out 23 pillars of the national front, including a phased withdrawal of foreign troops over two years, strengthening the central government and postponing further debate on federalism for four years, and comprehensive reforms in Iraq's security and administrative institutions. They emphasized that the national front was not anti-U.S. but rather shared the goals of fighting al-Qaida and countering Iranian influence. This initiative faces obvious challenges, many of which they identified, and the breadth and depth of support for it are unclear. The indigenous and cross-sectarian nature of the initiative is encouraging, however, and we look forward to further engagement with al-Jabiri and others and to evaluating the extent of support they have. End summary.

The Need for a Political Solution

¶2. (S) Al-Jabiri began with an analysis of Iraq's situation. He said that the U.S. had made two strategic mistakes during the occupation period that contributed to Iraq's current crisis. First, he said that selection of the Governing Council based in part on ethnic and sectarian "quotas" had set a terrible precedent for subsequent Iraqi politics by leading parties to define themselves by sect and ethnicity. "Iraqis needed freedom," he argued, "not quotas. The people who benefited from the quota system were the people from outside Iraq. The U.S. gave Iraq to people tied to Iran." The second strategic mistake, according to al-Jabiri, was Bremer's dissolution of the Iraqi army. "The army was an institution of the state, not of the regime," he claimed, and the situation of those who lost their jobs needed "a true answer, not what Maliki is doing now."

13. (S) Al-Jabiri stressed that Iraq needed a political solution. Characterizing the formal reconciliation process as Maliki's version of a political solution, he belittled it as a series of "festivals" rather than an effective political process. The reconciliation dialogue, he continued, had "not reached the groups who are carrying weapons." These groups were not willing to come to the table, he claimed, because they were deeply suspicious of the current Iraqi government, which they viewed as a tool of Iran.

The Solution: A National Front

14. (S) The solution, al-Jabiri claimed, was to dissolve the three large parliamentary alliances - the Shi'a coalition, Tawafuq, and the Kurdish alliance - into their constituent parties and to form a cross-sectarian, multiethnic "national front" of willing parties and individuals. He said that he and like-minded colleagues had devoted the past eight months to developing this idea and seeking the support of politicians and Iraqi groups inside and outside Iraq, as well as of regional Arab countries. He claimed to have the support of "all Sunni political leaders," including Tarik al-Hashemi, Mahmoud Mashhadani, Khalaf al-Ayyan, Adnan al-Dulaimi, and Salih al-Mutlaq. As an example, he said that al-Hashemi had appointed a representative to the front's "coordinating committee." He also claimed to have the support of Harith al-Dhari and seven of the eight resistance groups that operated under the umbrella Mujahideen Shura Council, including the Baath party but not including al-Qaida. Leaders of the seven groups, he said, were fundamentally nationalists who had entered into a marriage of

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convenience with al-Qaida in order to counter the U.S. and the "Iranian-dictated" government the U.S. had helped usher in. As soon as these groups felt that their nation was headed in the right direction, al-Jabiri claimed, they "would turn on al-Qaida and wipe it out."

15. (S) Al-Jabiri acknowledged that the front needed more Shi'a participation. Fadhila supported the idea, he claimed, and the Sadrists "were almost there." Al-Mayah clarified that the Sadrists had accepted the idea "in principle" but that further negotiations during the upcoming weeks would take place to overcome several sticking points. Al-Mayah said that they had presented the idea to Ibrahim al-Jafari but had not yet received a reply, and that they were going to present it to Prime Minister Maliki in the near future. Engagement with the Kurds, al-Jabiri said, would "come later." Al-Mayah emphasized that they were taking a "dual track" approach with Iraqis, working both inside and outside the CoR. In terms of regional states, al-Mayah claimed that the national front proposal had the support of Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf states. Finally, al-Mayah, who speaks excellent English, said that he had recently shopped the idea at some offices in the U.S. Congress and that he and al-Jabiri had presented it to British Embassy officials in Iraq.

16. (S) Acknowledging that groups such as the Sadrists and the Sunni resistance made unlikely bedfellows, al-Jabiri and al-Mayah said that it had taken some effort to find common ground between them, but that indeed they shared key objectives. The first objective was the need for withdrawal of coalition forces, i.e. an end to the "occupation." The second point was the need for a government and political structure that protected Iraq's national interests and countered pervasive Iranian influence. Al-Jabiri gave PolCouns a two page, 23 point statement of the principles of the national front that represented the points of agreement (full translation in paragraph 11). It calls for, among other points, ending the "occupation" over two years; reforming Iraq's security and administrative institutions;

creating a strong central government and postponing further debate on federalism for four years; disarming and demobilizing the militias and integrating their members into civilian life; adopting the policy of amnesty; and rejecting violence and terrorism.

Challenges

17. (S) Al-Jabiri, al-Mayah, and al-Musawi acknowledged, implicitly or explicitly, a number of key challenges the "national front" idea faced in order to come to fruition. First, they noted that they needed to convince more Shi'a politicians to join the effort. Asked by PolCouns if Sistani's apparent resistance to the splintering of the Shi'a coalition would stymie their efforts, al-Jabiri replied that the marja'ia realized the problems with the current political alignment and were no longer insisting on Shi'a unity. In saying that the Kurds would "come later," they implicitly recognized that they would not easily accept the front's nationalistic goals, including preservation of Iraq's "Arab-Islamic" identity. Al-Jabiri said that Kirkuk needed a "national solution" and expressed his support for the Baker-Hamilton recommendation that resolution of Kirkuk be delayed. In the context of Kirkuk, he noted that the SCIRI-Kurdish alliance would be difficult to overcome. Finally, al-Jabiri and al-Mayah both identified the personal security risks politicians who expressed support for the national front would face. Many would fear to join, they said, "because there would be an order for their death from Tehran." On the positive side, al-Jabiri noted that there was a willingness to discuss ideas like the national front on the Iraqi street, even if politicians were afraid to discuss it in public. He said there was no comparable discussion of the idea six months to one year ago.

Several Shared Goals with U.S.

18. (S) Al-Jabiri and al-Mayah took care to emphasize that the front they were building was not antithetical to U.S. goals and indeed desired a good relationship with the U.S. in the future. They argued that the front actually shared two key U.S. goals, namely fighting al-Qaida and countering Iran, and that it would work within a democratic governance framework. Al-Jabiri respectfully criticized two current elements of U.S. strategy, the Baghdad security plan (BSP) and the push for a "moderate front." The BSP, he argued, would not succeed because it tried to impose a military solution for what was essentially a political problem. The

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insurgents and terrorists, he said, would simply lie low or move somewhere else for three months. He characterized the moderate front as a U.S. initiative that would make sectarian groups like SCIRI more powerful. "Do you really consider SCIRI 'moderate'?" asked al-Mayah.

19. (S) Although they asked at one point for U.S. help in protecting politicians who supported the national front movement or in facilitating "secret votes" in the CoR (so that its supporters could vote without being identified), al-Jabiri and al-Mayah did not use the conversation to press for U.S. support as much as to describe their initiative. While PolCouns corrected them several times (e.g., noting that the BSP had political, economic, and social components in addition to the military plan, that the moderate front was not a U.S. initiative, and that the Prime Minister conceived of the reconciliation process more broadly than the conferences), she was mainly in a listening mode. She told them that the U.S. welcomed constructive multiethnic and cross-sectarian efforts to make political progress and emphasized that such efforts had to take place in Iraq's constitutional framework. She said that we would study their

proposal carefully and looked forward to continued discussions. Al-Jabiri, al-Mayah, and al-Musawi thanked PolCouns for listening to their initiative and asked that Embassy staff take care to protect their identities when discussing the initiative with others.

Comment

¶10. (S) This approach is al-Jabiri's second to the Embassy on this initiative; he and CoR speaker Mashhadani broached the idea with the Ambassador in early November, though he had not yet developed it to the same extent (reftel). We believe the "national front" initiative reflects a genuine effort at trying to develop common ground among a number of groups, both inside and outside of the political process, for whom Iraqi nationalism is a motivating force. It may also serve as a vehicle for Fadhila to try to boost its national influence at SCIRI's expense. The indigenous and cross-sectarian nature of the initiative, as al-Jabiri presented it, is encouraging. However, it clearly faces a number of obstacles, many of which al-Jabiri and al-Mayah identified. Although they did not mention it, we also question the extent to which Sunni political leaders would truly back this initiative, as it would require them to subsume their egos into a larger project. We look forward to further engagement with al-Jabiri and other leaders of this "national front" initiative and to evaluating the extent of support they have. End comment.

Basic Principles of the National Front

¶11. (SBU) Embassy translation of the 23 point statement follows.

The National Front Basic Principles

¶1. Maintaining the national unity of Iraq, its people, and maintaining its sovereignty and not dividing it politically, economically and administratively.

¶2. Maintaining the Arab-Islamic identity of Iraq.

¶3. Rejection of the policies of sectarian ethnic and religious Quotas.

¶4. Ending the state of occupation in all its forms in accordance with the following timetable:

--A. Ending all manifestations of the foreign occupation in all Iraqi cities during the first year

--B. Ending the state of foreign occupation in all forms and the removal of all of its various consequences during the second year.

¶5. Dissolving the militias and armed groups simultaneously in accordance with the following procedures:

--A. Withdraw all weapons from all militias and armed groups.

--B. Dismantle all organizational structures of all militias and armed groups.

--C. Rehabilitation of militia and armed group elements in civil institutions.

¶6. Reforming security and military institutions on the following basis:

--A. Building the institutions on pure national basis:

--B. Disallowing politicization of such institutions.

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--C. Affiliation with security and military institutions must be based on experience, technical and scientific qualifications.

--D. Former and present security and military institutions

are the cornerstones of stability in Iraq and for maintaining its security.

--E. Maintaining military traditions and not violating it.

--F. Rehabilitating these institutions and arming and modernizing them.

¶7. Reforming civil administrative institutions on the following basis:

--A. Liberating it from political control and election dues.

--B. Appointment in administrative positions (Deputy Minister and below) are to be made in accordance with administrative policies and on the basis of experience, efficiency and specialization and not on the basis of narrow sectarian, partisan and personal loyalties.

--C. Reforming the existing administrative system in Iraq

--D. Introducing the necessary technologies in the administrative institutions to raise the standard of performance.

¶8. Building a civil modern State based on citizenship and law.

¶9. Rejecting violence and terrorism in all forms.

¶10. To reconsider the strategy of building the form of the Iraqi State according to the following basis:

--A. Activating decentralized administration for four years.

--B. If decentralized administration succeeds, then it is possible to discuss the federal option on a nationally agreed basis.

--C. However in both cases, there should be a strong central government in place capable of pulling the sides to it and preserving national unity.

¶11. Transforming the present semi-presidential system in Iraq into a parliamentary system based on the principle of balance between the legislative and executive powers.

¶12. Adopting market economy for the Iraqi experiment with a limited interventional role for the State similar to the liberal experiments known in the west after the Second World War.

¶13. Constructing balanced relations with all countries based on mutual interests and noninterference in internal affairs.

¶14. Although resistance is a legitimate right for all peoples including the Iraqi people, however the violence and terrorism inflicted on our people cannot be considered resistance.

¶15. Reconsidering the permanent Constitution to an extent that achieves the highest possible level of national consensus.

¶16. Adopting a periodical peaceful transfer of power.

¶17. Natural resources belong to the Iraqi people and are to be managed by the central government. Their revenues shall be utilized on the principles of justice.

¶18. The Front adopts the policy of amnesty and transparency in addressing the escalating problems in Iraq.

¶19. The Front aims at spreading social peace and ending the escalating state of violence and terrorism.

¶20. The Front shall ensure providing basic services to the citizens such as electricity, fuel, drinking water and the like.

¶21. Comprehensive national reconciliation is the only option for providing security, stability and social peace in Iraq. This Front is preparing a step directed to national reconciliation.

¶22. The Front shall undertake to fight the escalating

financial and administrative corruption in the country.

¶23. Joining this Front is open to all Iraqis believing in the national project and the basic principles of this Front.
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